



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
24 November 2008

Original: English

Commission for Social Development

Forty-seventh session

4-13 February 2009

Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*

**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
priority theme: social integration**

Statement submitted by International Movement ATD Fourth World, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.5/2009/1.



Statement

I. Background

In 1995, at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, governments committed themselves to eradicating poverty by focusing on three specific objectives: poverty eradication, full employment and social integration. The Copenhagen Summit established that human social development should be redefined to include social integration through economic, social and cultural participation. These concepts were seen as integral to policy and program development, governmental action, and to the building of inclusive societies. The Copenhagen Summit also emphasized the need to create a society for all – societies that are safe, stable, tolerant, respectful, inclusive, and participatory.

Despite the desire to create an inclusive society, people in persistent poverty are repeatedly denied opportunities to be heard. The International Movement ATD Fourth World supports the idea of a society for all by emphasizing the need to build links between the poorest and most excluded people and people from different backgrounds. A true “Partnership with the Poorest” ensures that the dignity of all individuals is respected. The literature and on-the-ground experience in this area further emphasizes the importance of including the experiences of people living in poverty to “reach, touch, and convince” others to understand poverty more fully and improve poverty eradication initiatives working in partnership.¹ The International Movement ATD Fourth World believes that it is necessary to provide a mechanism for individuals living in poverty to participate actively and collaborate with policy makers. People in poverty and the communities they are part of must become key players in such policy making and initiatives.²

II. Social integration defined

The term *social integration* resists definition because of its constantly evolving nature. However, according to the UN Expert Group on Creating an Inclusive Society, it represents “the attempt not to make people adjust to society, but rather to ensure that society is accepting of all people.” It involves the embracing of individual differences, while consciously making a concerted and intentional effort to promote diversity by using highly participatory processes that involve – but do not coerce – all stakeholders in the decisions making process. The term *social inclusion* which is frequently used interchangeably – albeit erroneously – with social integration, suggests that one group, for example, people living in poverty, are included or merged into the larger society. There is potential danger in confusing these terms as inclusion – which indicates a power differential between one group and another – is antithetical to the concept of a partnership, where both parties share power. *Social exclusion* describes the process by which oppression, injustice, systemic neglect, and discrimination exist in social structures and in society.³ Social exclusion can occur on a micro-level (individual), a mezzo-level (organizations, communities), and a macro-level (governmental, structural). Social exclusion is therefore the opposite of social inclusion and social integration.

¹ *What Works for the Poorest? Knowledge Policies, and Practice*; Chronic Poverty Research Center, May 2007.

² Godinot, Xavier, *The Challenge of Building Knowledge With People Living in Extreme Poverty Not About Them*, 2006.

³ *Creating an Inclusive Society: Practical Strategies to Promote Social Integration*.

III. Wresinski approach

Having grown up himself in poverty, Joseph Wresinski, the late founder of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, acknowledged that the poorest and most excluded in a community are often denied their human rights and dignity. Wresinski believed that the act of charity, while motivated by good intentions, can undermine the dignity and efforts of people living in poverty. Believing that handouts contribute to feelings of inferiority, dependence and lack of dignity, Wresinski instead supported the idea of meaningful employment and education as a way to create a pathway out of poverty, while allowing individuals to maintain their sense of pride and self worth.

The publication *Redefining Human Rights-Based Development: The Wresinski Approach to Partnership with the Poorest* covers creating partnerships with the poorest as a key strategy in eradicating poverty and achieving social integration.⁴ The Wresinski Approach also seeks to redefine work and human activity to enhance social integration by affirming the right of an individual to pursue productive employment and be both creative and useful. These points suggest that true participation requires economic, social and cultural participation. Finally it proposes a number of creative initiatives that promote integration, employment and the eradication of poverty.

IV. Social integration in action: two case studies

This section includes real-world examples of people in poverty who have been active and integral participants in the development of policies and programs.

A. Case Study #1 – The Collective for a Quebec without Poverty is a diverse consortium of nearly 50 national and regional organizations that aim to eliminate poverty. The Collective, with the active participation of ATD Fourth World, successfully advocated for the development and elaboration of a provincial law⁵ from 2000-2002 aimed at the elimination of poverty using the collaboration, input and experience of people living in poverty. The Collective used a multi-phase approach to developing the law, by providing people experiencing poverty with opportunities for participation and input at each stage of the process.

1) Consultation – Participants from all over Quebec, including those living in poverty, were surveyed to determine their opinion regarding what the law should include. A proposal was then drafted integrating the thousands of comments and suggestions received from the survey. Proposals included suggestions that poverty eradication must be made a government priority, that the needs of the poorest fifth must be emphasized, and that those in poverty must be integral in the conception, implementation and evaluation of measures designed to tackle poverty.

2) Petition - Using the proposal as an outline, a petition was drafted and signed by over 200,000 people, which included the testimonies of people experiencing poverty themselves.

⁴ ESA/DSPD/BP3, December 1999.

⁵ http://www.pauvrete.qc.ca/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=113.

- 3) Submission - The proposal was then submitted to the National Assembly and was sent to members of Parliament who were asked for an outline of the law based on the proposal.
- 4) Lobbying - The Collective then presented 167 submissions to the Parliamentary Commission, including several which included the input of people living in poverty.
- 5) Organization of events - Several events were organized that provided an opportunity for people living in poverty to talk of their experiences. A Citizens Forum and Citizens Agora (Roundtable) focused on facilitating conversation regarding this issue. The Collective organized breakfasts with Members of Parliament, during which participants played Monopoly-style games based on real-life experiences and situations of poverty.
- 6) Inclusion - Several representatives of people living in poverty were invited to join the Collective Advisory Committee. This ensured that members of the Collective were better able to understand the lives of these individuals, and that those living in poverty had an opportunity to contribute their knowledge and experience.
- 7) Reference to international instruments - By referencing several international instruments on civil and political rights, the Collective was better able to influence the government.
- 8) Widespread mobilization - There was widespread support for the development and revision of this law across all regions in Quebec.

Without the work of the Collective, the law would not have been elaborated to include the perspective of individuals living in poverty. Although the process was lengthy, it is successful in demonstrating the need for social integration of the poorest and most excluded.

B. Case Study #2 - BRAC,⁶ based in Bangladesh, is one of the largest non-governmental organizations in the world. BRAC has successfully funded several ventures, including an economic development program, a university and other education programs, public healthcare, social development programmes and disaster relief. BRAC approaches poverty using a holistic approach acknowledging that poverty is not just related to a lack of income, but a lack of access to resources that includes education, healthcare, employment, and housing.⁷ By emphasizing the importance of empowering citizens and supporting them in their individual development, instead of utilizing a charity-based perspective, which encourages dependence and disempowerment in the recipient, BRAC tackles poverty using a multifaceted approach. BRAC uses a mixture of practical and creative solutions that put individuals who are living in poverty at the center of their efforts in eradicating poverty. By encouraging participation of those who are the most impoverished and engaging them throughout the process, BRAC is successful in its advocacy, empowerment and developmental efforts.

⁶ <http://www.brac.net>.

⁷ Ahmad, Q., *Socio-Economic and Indebtedness-related Impact of Micro-credit in Bangladesh*, 2007.

One of BRAC's core focus areas is microcredit (first introduced by the Grameen Bank) which is the practice of lending very small amounts of money to individuals who are living in poverty who lack the resources to obtain independent loans. While microcredit has been successful in supporting many individuals worldwide, many of the poorest and most excluded people are not reached. In order to address the issue, BRAC established a program called 'Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction/Targeting the Ultra Poor' which aims to pull the "ultra poor" out of extreme poverty by providing a subsidy along with access to enterprise development training, healthcare, social development and asset transfer.⁸ The program thus underscores the importance of offering equitable levels of support and loans to meet the differing needs of individuals within a community. In doing so, BRAC shows that social protection moves beyond the boundaries of simple economic assistance, charity, and poverty alleviation.

V. Social integration toolkit: building partnerships with people in poverty

In order to expand the concept of social integration, ATD Fourth World has developed a toolkit for practice titled, *"Turning Rhetoric into Action: Building effective partnerships to combat extreme poverty and exclusion"*. This report served as a background paper for a roundtable Dialogue on the issue, which was one of the many events commemorating October 17th, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty at the United Nations in New York. The roundtable brought together a diverse group of individuals including people experiencing poverty, UN mission representatives, grass-roots activists, UN specialized agency staff and key players from civil society. The International Movement ATD Fourth World Movement's goal was to use the roundtable as a springboard to further discussion and work in the field.

The participation toolkit defines who 'the poorest' are and describes the key benefits of enabling the long term participation of people living in poverty. A chapter on meaningful participation provides discussion on the shortcomings and quality of current processes, and suggests change in the approach. A chapter on creating conditions for participation includes information on identifying factors that promote or impede success in creating meaningful participation, along with a decision-making flowchart that can be used locally, nationally and internationally. It also offers suggestions for creating meaningful and active participation. The toolkit concludes with a series of case studies from around the world which highlight examples of participation of people living in poverty.

VI. Conclusion

Social integration is not just a concept but also a way of life that allows for the meaningful participation of all members of our society, especially the poorest and most excluded. Joseph Wresinski had a vision that the poorest and most excluded would achieve such participation giving long term support and companionship. If true social integration is to occur, it will require a concerted effort from those who seek to promote the dignity of all people, starting from the experience and lives of those whose human rights and dignity are undermined by extreme poverty.

⁸ Barua, P., Sulaiman, M., Targeting the Poorest in Microfinance: Poverty Outreach of BDP Ultra Poor Programme, Working Paper No. 13, 2006.